

As Sheldon Adelson takes stand in casino trial, wisecracks ensue

Written by Administrator
Sunday, 07 April 2013 02:33 -

LAS VEGAS — Billionaire casino mogul [Sheldon Adelson](#) looked relaxed. His arm was slung over the back of the courtroom witness chair with the cozy demeanor of a guest on an afternoon talk show. He was dressed impeccably in a gray business suit, blue shirt and red-and-white tie, but the look on his face was purely personal, a grandfather telling a story.

He talked about his impoverished Boston childhood, his parents fresh off the latest immigrant boat. “I could have been a rags to riches story,” he said, smiling, congenially facing the jury. “But my parents couldn’t afford the rags.” Jurors smiled unconsciously.

Moments later, guided by the soft questioning of his attorney, Adelson, 79, hit them with another one-liner that would have made Henny Youngman proud: “I came from the other side of the tracks. In fact, I came from so far on the other side, I didn’t know the tracks existed.”

For two days last week, one of the world’s richest men had been an adverse witness, a man on the defensive, cross-examined by a pacing lawyer representing a former gaming consultant who says that Adelson, chief executive of the [Las Vegas Sands Corp.](#) casino empire, owes him \$328 million in a breach of contract.

Adelson, a stalwart Republican and defender of Israel who, with his wife, donated nearly \$100 million to GOP candidates in last year’s elections, had been summoned to testify, and his appearance drew onlookers to the courtroom eager for a glimpse of a reclusive tycoon whose worth reportedly exceeds \$26 billion.

What greeted them was no Perry Mason courtroom scene, no nail-biting drama. This was a nuts-and-bolts civil litigation case in which the clock moved so slowly at times it seemed to go backward.

But it was also an affair marked by occasional humor from an unlikely source: Adelson himself.

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Hour after hour, as jurors shifted uncomfortably in their seats, lawyer John O'Malley spelled out the reasons why Adelson's firm should pay Hong Kong businessman Richard Suen. The contractor, he claimed, successfully worked behind the scenes more than a decade ago to help Adelson get a foothold in Macao, a special administrative region of China that is now the world's biggest gambling market, where Las Vegas Sands Corp. runs half a dozen casinos.

Sands lawyers deny the claim, saying the company's success abroad was due to its own initiative.

Projecting contracts, letters and emails on a screen near the jury, O'Malley hammered hard, interrupting the diminutive Adelson, reviewing the sleep-inducing documents again and again to make his point. On Thursday afternoon, the next morning and into the afternoon, the often-contentious cross examination dragged on.

But just when the eyes of many observers began to get heavy, Adelson often fired off one-liners that lightened the mood and even amused Clark County District Judge Rob Bare. Rather than silence Adelson, Bare sometimes offered himself as straight man.

At one point, Bare questioned Adelson about taking notes while on the stand, gently scolding that Adelson couldn't listen to the questions of the plaintiff's attorney if he was writing.

"I want you to do one thing at a time," Bare said.

"You have something in common with my wife," the mogul responded.

"Then you're used to getting that advice," the judge fired back.

Moments later, when admonishing Adelson for offering opinions — and not facts — on the stand, the judge again joined Adelson on comic turf.

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“Mr. Adelson,” he began, “I’m going to sound like your wife again ...”

“Now I’m getting it nighttime and daytime,” Adelson said.

Even when there seemed no room for levity, Adelson found a way. At one point, O’Malley showed him a humdrum-looking fax detailing a long-ago business transaction.

“It’s a little blurry,” Adelson said. “I’m getting older every day.”

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